

# The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. 1. **W**hy Rats, Toads, Ravens, Screech-Owls, &c. are Ominous; and how come they to foreknow fatal Events?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. If the Querist had said *unlucky* instead of *ominous*, he might easily have met with satisfaction. A Rat is so, because he destroys many a good Cheshire Cheese, and makes dreadful Ravages in a flourishing Flitch of Bacon. A Toad is *unlucky*, because it poisons. As for Ravens and Screech Owls, they are just as unlucky as Cats, when about their Courtship, because they make an ugly Noise which disturbs the Neighbourhood. The Instinct of Rats leaving an old Ship, is because they cannot be dry in it, and an old House, because perhaps they want Victims. A Raven is much such a Prophet as our Conjurers or Almanack-makers, foretelling things after they are come to pass: They follow great Armies, as Vultures, not as foreboding Battle, but for the Dead Men, Dogs, Horses, &c. which (especially in a March) must daily be left behind them. For the foolish Observations made on their Croaking before Death, &c. though we'll not positively assert there is never any thing in that, or Stories of the like nature, yet this we safely may, that the most of it is pure Chance, Fancy, Superstition and Humour, and has no ground in the World besides foolish Tradition, or a sickly Imagination.

Quest. 2. How is a natural Defect in the Parent, communicated to the Child; by the Particles of the Semen or otherwise?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. Fancy may have a great share here, as well as in the former Cases, and the Defect of the Father be so strongly fixed on the Mothers Mind, as to impress it on the Child. Natural defect seems an unphilosophical Term, for all Defects are monstrous, and as such unnatural. Accidental Defects indeed there may be, and we find daily are, but if this proceeds from the Male Parent, by the Particles of the Semen, such Defects are only in Quality, not Quantity; as Consumptions and other Diseases, may be easily propagated, because the Semen being elaborated from the Blood, and both corrupted, that corruption must be conveyed to whatever is thence composed. But this is nothing as to Quantity; nor does a Lame Man beget a Lame, or a Blind a Blind, unless accidentally. Stuttering Parents, have, it's true, had Children troubled with the same Defect; but this we look upon rather to proceed from Imitation, than any other cause.

Quest. 3. Whether the case of the Suspended Clergy for refusing the Oaths to King William and Queen Mary, is not as hard, as the turning out the Fellows of Magdalen College, 1687?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. We think not, for these Reasons, one was against Law, the other not. One was done by the worst of Men, by a pretended Commission, without any legal Power, for the introducing Popery, and the Persons concerned incapacitated for any other Employment. The other by the venerable Authority of King, Lords and Commons, for the Security of the Government, (which must be weak indeed to suffer such to enjoy publick Emoluments under its Protection, who absolutely disown it,) and strengthening the Interest both of Church and State, by putting at least as good and more wise Men in their rooms, while they may still by an Indulgence, never before any where practised in the like Instance, Preach, be Chaplains, Lecturers; and several of them so continue actually to this day.

Quest. 4. Whether a Man may defend himself against whosoever attempts to Kill him?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. Yes, if 'tis a private Person, who makes such an Attempt; for I have certainly as good a Right (and much better,) to defend my Life, as another has to assault it. Nay, if a Prince or a Father, we think the same Argument holds, as to mere Self-Defence, though the thing has much much more of Difficulty, supposing it were impossible to Defend a Man's self, without Offending, perhaps killing the *Unjust Assailant*; though even in that case, if the Publick Good, and the Safety and Happiness of Millions depended on his Life, a Man might deserve to be rank'd among those Heroes, who devoted themselves for their Country, could he arise to that

height of Gallantry, rather to lose his own Life, than injure the others.

Quest. 5. Whether the Law of Nations was not violated in the Person of Mary Queen of Scots, who found a Prison where she sought Protection, notwithstanding Queen Elizabeth assured her of all manner of kind Offices?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. Though she found more than a Prison, I mean a Scaffold, and though the Assertion of some Persons in the ensuing Reign, and either the *wistaken Pity*, or Malice of some Authors, in that and succeeding Ages would so persuade us; yet we are of the same Opinion with the Reverend Bishops of that Age, the prudent Council of the Queen, and all who loved England, that all the hardships that *Princess* endured, (whose Memory those are the greatest *Enemies* to, who keep it from Oblivion,) were not only politick and necessary, but highly Just and Lawful. She came hither for Protection, because she could fly no where else; she was not content with that Protection, but most ungratefully *Conspired* against the Throne and Life of that *Blessed Princess* who gave it her, and this under her own Hand, which even *Causing* himself in her Life, though a *Jesuit*, has not the Front to deny. By this she forfeited her Protection, and justly incurred the *Punishment* she afterwards underwent.

Quest. 6. Who was the French King's Father, and whether he was born with Teeth; and if so, the Cause thereof?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. The first part of the Question perhaps will never be resolved till the Day of Judgment. The *Protestants* indeed sought Storily to prove him the *Legitimate Son of Lewis the Thirteenth*; and it may be, their *Swords* were the strongest part of his *Title*, for which he has since very well *Rewarded* them. However, in all probability, it could not be that weak Prince that was his real Father; his *aversion to Women*, and the *Reasons* of it too, being sufficiently known to the World. But whether the Gentleman who has been mentioned in some *Prints*, Mr. *Le-Grand* were the *real Father* of his *Name-sake*, we can learn little from *publick Inveftives*; for if really so, it can't be imagined but a thing of that Nature would have been managed too *deep for the Day*, by that cunning *Politician* who contrived it.

Of his being born with *Teeth*, see the *Bassamier's Letter*, as quoted in the First Volume of the new *Observator*, as well as of the Judgment then by him made thereof: And indeed if we admit any thing of *Omens*, one would be apt by the event to believe it here, and that *Nature* itself had marked him out for a *Beast of Prey* as soon as ever he came into the World.

Quest. 7. How a Man shall know himself? This Question was formerly mentioned, Numb. 3. But on the Gentlemen's repeated Instances, and sober and ingenuous Protestations of his Ignorance, in this Grand Question, we resume it here, and for direction to him and others, give these following short Rules.

Ans<sup>w</sup>. 1. Know your *Creator*, and that's one of the best ways to know your self: Almost all *Knowledg* is acquired by Comparison: After his Image you are made; see then, if you'd know your self, whether you are degenerated, or really like your great *Original*.

2. Know other Men; see their *Faults* and *Virtues*, apply them, and you may thence easily judge of your own.

3. Know your *Enemies*, and if possible, what they think or say of you: Believe it, this is a much surer way than to consult your *Friends*, and you'll hear much more from the first than last. And these are the best Directions we can give.

Quest. 8. Is Melancholy Natural or Accidental?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. 'Tis evidently both, as appears from common Experience and our former discourse of the Causes thereof.

Quest. 9. Would not England be happy, if they wanted both *Papists* and *Jacobites*?

Ans<sup>w</sup>. Too happy; but ten to one they'd quickly find work among themselves to make them otherwise.

Quest.

Quest. 10. What Methods would be most proper to reconcile our Differences?

Ans. Either Forty Thousand French landed in England, or King William's returning in triumph Conqueror of France; or else, which might be sooner done than either, though I doubt will prove harder than both, all Parties at Home growing more Wise and more Humble.

Quest. 11. What Distraction is, and whether it can be ever Pleasant?

Ans. Distraction or Madness is the height of Melancholy; and what that is, you may look back and see. It may be accidentally pleasant even to those who feel it, who are sometimes taken with Passions of Laughter as well as Grief.

Quest. 12. Whether Satyrs or Sermons have been more successful towards Reforming Mens Manners?

Ans. Some Sermons are Satyrs (which we could easily point to,) and some Satyrs are Sermons, for example, Horace's. We'll not be so uncharitable to say both much alike, because the World is incorrigible, and minds neither; but taking them as they are commonly distinguish'd, I desire one Instance of a Man Lampoon'd out of Vice, though we have some few of those who have been Preach'd out on't. At least I dare be bold to say, our English way of Satyr will hardly ever do't, since 'tis for the most part like our Fighting, downright and bloody, and that generally pleases most, which calls most hard Names, which may enrage a Man, and make him look about for suitable Returns. It will I say, make him angry, but I am mistaken if it ever makes him better.

Quest. 13. Whether Essence be really distinguished from Existence?

Ans. If by really, be meant *ut res & res*, it cannot be so, for every thing having its Essence and Existence, if those were distinguished after that manner of distinction, both of them must have still a distinct Essence and Existence of their own, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Nor can we see Reason to grant they should be so much as distinguished, *ut Res, & modus Rei*; seeing Existence seems to be of the Essence of every thing, since a thing in power is really nothing; and if Essence be that, by which a thing is what it is, Existence appears to be supposed and implied therein.

Quest. 14. Whether there be not an Incommensurable, and therefore in some respect an infinite Power in Lines, when 'tis proved by 47 Prop. Euclid, that in a plain Triangle, the Square of the Hypotenusa, or greater side subtending the right Angle, is in power equal to the Square of the Two other Sides, but not to be expressed by Numbers, unless every side does consist of a Square Number?

Ans. If the Gentleman please to distinguish in what Book of Euclid, and whether he means by an Infinite Power, a Zennical or a Mathematical one, we shall be better able to give him an Answer; but that his Distinction may be regular, let him consider the use of the 16th Prop. of the Third Book of Eucl.

Quest. 15. What is the reason that sometimes before Rainy Weather, Marble and other Stones have (as it were) a Dew upon them?

Ans. All Bodies are naturally porous, and therefore receptive of Air, whose Nature is to penetrate and fill up Vacuities, where the more purer Element of Fire has not already taken Possession. And as the Nature of Air is to penetrate, so 'tis also to Circulate as Water does, only being finer it moves faster. This premised, it follows, that in or before Rainy Weather, the Air being thick with Vapours and Exhalations in its Circulation, it cannot penetrate a Pillar, Marble Stones, &c. before it puts off its more gross and aqueous particles, which it leaves behind upon the Pillars, in the nature of Drops or Tears. I remember an Instance that in the late King James's Chappel, in the midst of the last great Frost, in a numerous Concourse of People, the Air was so condensed with their Breath, that it had the Effects above mentioned upon the Pillars, (as I am very credibly informed by a Gentleman that was there at that time.) Now in Frosts every little Naturalist can tell you, that both the Water and Air is rarified, and that all Liquors grow clear sooner in such time than in any other, which with what is above mentioned, plainly infers the truth of the preceeding Hypothesis.

Quest. 16. Why a Vessel with Oars, Sails, and full Wind, and setting out with the Tide at the Buoy in the Nore, can't be seen at Billingsgate by Four Hours as the Tide?

Ans. If the Querist be concerned in any Employ that way, it will be some satisfaction to his Curiosity, if he

puts a small Cork into the Water, cut in the shape of an Half-peny, and try whether he can keep Pace with that, at the Buoy of the Nore, also another in the midway, and another near Billingsgate; and after this trial, perhaps he may conclude with me, that when the Tide is turned at the Buoy in the Nore, the Reflux is driven on by the Revolving Ocean with such a vehemence at the beginning, (because there are so little Obstacles and Banks to hinder it) that 'tis impossible to overtake it again; though when the Reflux comes to be limited and obstructed by a Narrower Channel, the force is spent, and you may sail a great deal faster than the Current for several of the last Miles.

Quest. 17. What is the Reason that some sort of Rotten Wood will shine in the Dark, and what sort that is? I have often seen it, but could never understand the Reason; therefore I desire to be satisfied.

Ans. All Light that is borrowed, as the Moon, Stars, and such as is nourished by matter, as Fire, Candles, &c. are reflective, and afford some Emanations and Rays; but this (as also the Glow worm,) yields no light at all, or any brightness so as to discern any other Object by them; therefore their light or brightness is not from without or borrowed. If so, it must be a natural brightness which is accidental, as Colours are to Flowers, diversified only in this, these are not discernable but by a real Light, and those are not discernable but in the privation of Light: This Rotten Wood is only the brightest and whitest sort of old Ash, very common and easy to be got.

Quest. 18. What is the Reason that when Two Viols are tuned in Unison, one of them being touch'd, the other will answer, though at a distance?

Ans. This is a noble and great proof of the sweet Composure and Harmonious Order of the Creation; and 'tis but a more pure sort of Sympathizing that is found in all the Creatures, when those of the same Species flock together.

Indeed, the reason of this Musical Sympathy is something puzzling, and more admired than understood by some of our great Musick Masters. But 'tis thus effected: 'Tis Air that is the proper Vehicle and Conveyance of Sounds; and accordingly, as the Air is driven with greater or lesser violence, it affects all Objects that it meets with. A Cistern perhaps is by its make, as much accommodated for the reception of Sounds, as any other Instrument, therefore we'll consider the Effects of a revercusive Air upon that: An Ordinary Noise will beat the Air every way, and that which meets with these Strings, will move 'em all into a distinguishable Audibility, proportionable to the shrillness or smallness of the Voice; this is universally granted by such as have made the Experiment. Now since this Voice in what Key or Note soever it's delivered, does effect the sounding of so many Notes at once, and that these Notes are proportionable to a greater or lesser Agitation of the Air; then the efficient Cause, is the Motion of the Air, and not the Unison, as is generally thought: Though we cannot deny the Sympathy to be more effective, than in different Keys. As is evident by a piece of Paper which will violently tremble upon a String that is an Unison when it lies almost still upon other Keys, and all by the same agitation of Air.

Quest. 19. Whether did Lucretia, Codrus, Plato, &c. do well or ill in the act of Suicide? or whether Suicide in any case is lawful?

Ans. Nature has implanted a General Instinct of self preservation in every individual Creature, and we find not an Instance in one, that has voluntarily chose a Non-existence, though under the greatest Misery and Torture besides Man. Man that acknowledges a Creator, cannot at the same time deny a tenure of his Life, which to dispose of before the Donor demands it, is contradictory to his dependence; Lucretia unhappily evinced her wrong'd Chastity by Murdering her self; for if she was not consenting to Tarquin's Crime, why did she pollute her Hands with the blood of an Innocent? I mean her self. 'Tis unreasonable for me to suffer for a fault another would have Committed. Punishments and Offences justly terminate in the same Person. Cato was either a good or ill Man; if a good Man, he wrong'd his Country, by depriving it of what Service he might have done it; if an ill Man, he impeach'd the prerogative of Justice, in making himself his own Witness, Judge and Executioner. A Brave Soldier won't quit his Post without his Commanders leave; Fortitude abides Miseries, but Cowardice sneaks to Death to shun them. I remember something of Seneca to this effect, viz. A Wise Man fortifies himself by Reason, and a Fool by Despair.